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EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Buenos Aires

Rec'd 12/4
CE
& Argentina

November 21, 1979

AK 345

OFFICIAL-INFORMAL

Patrick J. Flood, Esquire
HA/HR
Department of State
Washington, D.C.

Dear Pat:

I have just received a copy of your November 7, 1979 letter to Professor Garrels concerning the disappearance of Lorenzo Viñas and his wife. The letter seems unexceptionable, except for your assertion that we have submitted this case to FOWG. In fact, we have not, since in this case we lack the date and place of disappearance. According to ground rules with FOWG, the Embassy has never made submissions to it without this information. We did speak with Kive Staif, as suggested by Viñas' father. Staif was reluctant to get involved but did promise to look into the matter and get back in touch with us if he learned anything. He has not again contacted us, however.

The whole question of FOWG is a subject that I have been meaning to write to you about for some time. At the present it is not working -- and in fact has not been working for us since about June 1979 when we got our last replies from the FOWG on requests we submitted in May.

The FOWG -- Martin Saravia -- asserted to us that the number of requests to FOWG has badly overloaded the Ministry of the Interior -- which conducts the records search. As a result, he said, he had not submitted any requests to the Ministry from the Embassy since May 1979. (We now have about 300 requests pending with FOWG.)

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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(X) Release () Excise () Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: () In Part (X) In Full

() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

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Saravia went on to say that he would like the Embassy to annotate on our requests the source of the original inquiry to the USG e.g. a member of Congress, a private American organization, an individual. The GOA then could give priority, for example to the Congressional requests -- and by implication would ignore the others.

We have not accepted Saravia's ground rules, yet. In the first place, as we told him, the requests are not made by individuals but by the USG. In the second, as we also told him, we would be reluctant to get involved in a process which seemed designed to discriminate among our petitions. In the third place, as we did not tell him, we smelled Ambassador Arlia's hand in this maneuver -- though there is also probably some truth to the report of objections from the Interior Ministry. Since Arlia was due out shortly and we were also getting a new Director for US Affairs at the Foreign Office we considered it best to wait for these changes rather than accede to Saravia's request. Neither have we acted on the Foreign Office's suggestion that we identify (from the MFA's list) those inquiries of ours which have also been made by the OAS. The FOWG would then give us the replies that have been made to the OAS on these cases. This maneuver seemed an unsatisfactory halfway house, which would provide nothing new since the interested parties would already have heard from the OAS.

Arlia is now gone and we also have the new US Director and we will again take this issue up, starting with the latter individual.

As you know to some degree -- and probably a large degree -- the whole FOWG exercise is a charade as a device for getting information, although it did serve the useful function of getting an "official" response on individual cases. (Never mind that nine out of ten came back "no record." That too is a kind of record.) As far as I know we have never turned up a disappeared through a FOWG inquiry. Rather, it has served as a device that allows us -- and the GOA -- to appear responsive to humanitarian requests for information about a missing person.

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Thus, I am not certain that beyond serving as a useful bureaucratic device it now has much justification. In fact, on political terms the case can be made for the opposite being true. But we will continue to plug away to try to get the paper flowing again.

Best Regards,



Townsend B. Friedman
First Secretary

cc: ARA/ECA - Mr. Whitman

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